

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-05 INR-07 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6651
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS
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S E C R E T MOSCOW 613

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR, IT, UR
SUBJECT: BREZHNEV'S HEALTH

REF: (A) PARIS 939, (B) MOSCOW 225

1. WE ARE INCLINED TO DISCOUNT SUBSTANCE OF
INTRIGUING RUMOR REPORTED BY EMBASSY PARIS, FOR
FOLLOWING REASONS:

--MOST PCI DELEGATIONS TO MOSCOW TOUCH BASE
WITH ITALIAN EMBASSY AND PASS ALONG HIGHLIGHTS OF THEIR
MEETINGS WITH SOVIET OFFICIALS; BUT OUR COLLEAGUES IN
ITALIAN EMBASSY KNOW OF NO MEETING IN LAST SEVERAL
MONTHS BETWEEN PCI LEADERS AND ANDROPOV;

--PCI DELEGATION WHICH ARRIVED IN MOSCOW
JANUARY 6 CALLED ON ITALIAN AMBASSADOR AFTERNOON OF
JANUARY 12 AND SAID NOTHING TO HIM ABOUT ANDROPOV OR
BREZHNEV'S HEALTH;

--THAT RUMOR STEMS FROM PCI DELEGATION OTHER
THAN ONE CURRENTLY IN TOWN IS INDICATED BY ITALIAN
SOURCE'S NOTING THAT BREZHNEV HAD NOT APPEARED SINCE
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DECEMBER 8 (EXCEPT FOR BRIEF TV FILM CLIP); TV FILM
OF BREZHNEV'S JANUARY 5 APPEARANCE WAS LENGTHY,
AND PCI DELEGATION WHICH ARRIVED HERE JANUARY 6
SURELY KNEW ABOUT BREZHNEV'S HEAVILY-PUBLICIZED
JANUARY 5 APPEARANCE;

--IF REPORTED PCI-ANDROPOV CONVERSATION TOOK

PLACE BEFORE JANUARY 4, IT WOULD BE HARD TO SQUARE WITH MFA FIRST EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT CHIEF DUBININ'S TELLING ITALIAN AMBASSADOR OFFICIALLY ON JANUARY 4 THAT BREZHNEV HAD ONLY FLU AND NOTHING ELSE (MOSCOW 225, PARA 3), AS WELL AS WITH SIMILAR REMARKS BY PONOMAREV AND GROMYKO TO AMBASSADOR TOON IN LATE DECEMBER.

2. MORE GENERALLY, IT SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT FULL POLITBURO MEMBER AND KGB CHIEF ANDROPOV WOULD ENTRUST PCI OFFICIALS WITH EXTRAORDINARILY SENSITIVE INFORMATION ABOUT BREZHNEV'S ALLEGED TERMINAL ILLNESS.

3. OF COURSE, NEITHER WE NOR ITALIAN EMBASSY CAN RULE OUT POSSIBILITY OF UNANNOUNCED PCI-ANDROPOV MEETING. AND APPARENT FACT THAT BREZHNEV SUFFERED RELAPSE FOLLOWING HIS JANUARY 5 APPEARANCE AT KREMLIN AWARD CEREMONY (AND SO FAR HAS NOT MET WITH VISITING ALGERIAN PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE) CANNOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY. AS REPORTED REF B, MOSCOW RUMOR MILL IS BUZZING ABOUT BREZHNEV, BUT TO DATE RUMOR REPORTED REF A HAS NOT SURFACED AMONG WESTERN DIPLOMATIC OR JOURNALIST CORPS HERE.

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